

## Foreword: Literature in Carpathian Rus´

Although Carpatho-Rusyn literature dates back to the sixteenth century, it emerged as a distinct creative movement only after the Revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe, which sparked a Rusyn cultural renaissance and permitted the revival of Carpatho-Rusyn identity in the ancestral Rusyn homeland. Situated at a crossroads of states, cultures, and languages, Rusyn literature has survived a history of political oppression, linguistic disorder, and cultural denigration. Today a renewed Rusyn literature, written in newly codified linguistic variants, plays a decisive role in shaping the national identity of the stateless Carpatho-Rusyn people.

The Carpatho-Rusyn homeland straddles the borders of five countries—Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. For much of the twentieth century, however, Rusyns did not officially exist in their homeland, and even today they are still struggling for recognition in Ukraine, where the Transcarpathian oblast is home to three-quarters of the approximately one million European Rusyns. This came about because after World War II, Soviet-dominated governments stubbornly denied the existence of any such ethnicity or language and instead imposed Ukrainian language and culture on Rusyns—not just in Ukraine, but in Poland and Czechoslovakia as well. Only the former Yugoslavia recognized a small population of 20,000 Rusyns, descendants of immigrants from the Carpathian region to the Vojvodina, as an official minority distinct from Ukrainians. By the late twentieth century, Rusyn identity elsewhere had seemingly evaporated or assimilated to more prominent neighboring ethnic groups.

Shortly before the fall of Communist rule, however, it became clear that Rusyns had not disappeared, and since that time a Rusyn renaissance has been underway. Today Rusyns are recognized as an official minority in Hungary, Slovakia, Poland (where they are known as Lemkos), the Czech Republic, Romania, Serbia, and Croatia. Only in Ukraine, political and cultural authorities continue to reject the notion that Rusyns are distinct from Ukrainians. While the parliament of Transcarpathia recognized Rusyns in the oblast in 2007 and while there is increasing acknowledgement of the regional distinction of Rusyn culture, the Rusyn language is still considered a dialect of Ukrainian and Rusyn culture is classified as a branch of the Ukrainian cultural tree.

One of the first projects for the newly recognized Carpatho-Rusyns was to standardize their language. As a result of political repression and economic factors that hindered widespread printing, a Rusyn literary standard was not established during the mid-nineteenth-century national awakening when other Slavic groups codified their languages. Over the centuries, the Rusyn lands have known several "official" languages, including Church Slavonic, Latin, Hungarian, Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, Czech, and Slovak. For much of its history, Rusyn literature was written in a mixed language, based on the local recension of Church Slavonic, with degrees of Hungarian, Slovak, Polish, and local dialectal influences. There had been unsuccessful efforts in the 1920s and 1930s to standardize a Rusyn literary language on the basis of the vernacular in Poland and the Prešov region of Slovakia, but, except in the Vojvodina of Yugoslavia, throughout the second half of the twentieth century all the Rusyns of Eastern Europe were compelled to use Ukrainian.

The Rusyns of the Carpathian region speak several East Slavic dialects, which can be broadly classified as belonging to a western group, used in Poland and Slovakia, and an eastern group, used in the Transcarpathian oblast of Ukraine. In 1992, the First Congress of the Rusyn Language convened and decided that individual literary variants would be established for Rusyns living in Poland, Slovakia, and Ukraine. Thus, it was only in 1995 that a Rusyn literary language was formally standardized in Slovakia, and in 1999 a codified standard was created for the Lemko Rusyns of Poland. Despite the official lack of recognition of Rusyns in Ukraine, efforts have been made by dedicated individuals in Transcarpathia to develop the local vernacular, which is now used increasingly in literature. A literary standard was established in the former Yugoslavia as early as the 1920s. The Third Congress of the Rusyn Language, held in 2007, began to discuss the creation of a Rusyn *koiné* that could be used in all regions of Carpathian Rus'.

The progress achieved since 1989 in the official recognition of Carpatho-Rusyns and the codification of the Rusyn language has for the first time in history created favorable conditions for the development of Rusyn literature. Through centuries of cultural oppression under the Habsburg monarchy and later the Soviet empire, Rusyn literature has persisted in various forms and in several languages, and its history is one of resolute but ill-fated initiatives. Historical evidence suggests the existence of literary activity in Carpathian Rus' as early as the tenth or eleventh century. Up to the fifteenth century, Carpatho-Rusyn manuscripts belong to the supranational Church Slavonic linguistic tradition, but from the sixteenth century, Carpatho-Rusyn texts manifest distinctive linguistic and cultural features. In the wars that wracked the Carpathian region in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Rusyns felt pressure from both Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, and in response, they found a way to preserve and protect their religious and cultural heritage in the

Uniate (later Greek Catholic) Church, which retained the use of Church Slavonic and other Orthodox customs but came under the jurisdiction of the pope. Thus, by the end of the eighteenth century, the Rusyns had fashioned a unique “in-between” national narrative—between East and West, Orthodoxy and Catholicism, orature and literature, Slavonic and Latin, and the Hungarian or Polish standard language and the Rusyn vernacular. In early manuscripts, a distinctive Rusyn voice can be perceived in miscellanies and interpretive gospels, polemical tracts, and *virshi* and spiritual songs, as well as in celebratory odes written in Church Slavonic and Latin, and in a few texts in Rusyn vernacular.

The beginning of a truly Rusyn literature came only with the national awakening of the mid-nineteenth century, when Aleksander Dukhnovych (1803–65), who is recognized as “the national awakener” of the Rusyns, began the elaboration of a Rusyn cultural tradition. Dukhnovych put literature firmly in the service of the national cause, and in poetry, prose, history, journalism, and drama, he directly addressed the Rusyn people about the realities of their existence. Dukhnovych was the author of the first primer for Rusyns, *Reader for Beginners* (*Книжиця читалная для начинающих/Кнызхытсия чыталнаиа дlia nachynaiushchykh*, 1847), which contained a long didactic poem in Rusyn vernacular that challenged negative stereotypes and advocated educational enlightenment and national regeneration. Also included in the primer was Dukhnovych’s lyrical poem “Life of a Rusyn” (“Жизнь Русина”/“Zhyzn’ Rusyna”), which extols earthy reality in the spirit of romanticism and reveals a deep sympathy for the innate nobility of the downtrodden and unappreciated Rusyn peasant. Together with his play *Virtue Is More Important than Riches*<sup>1</sup> (*Добродѣтель превышает богатство/Dobrodĕtel’ prevŭshaet bohatstvo*, 1850), these works constitute Dukhnovych’s creative formulation of the Rusyn national character. He also celebrated Rusyn national feeling in the poem “Dedication” (“Вручаніе”/“Vruchanie,” 1851) with the famous lines that have become an inspirational slogan for Rusyns everywhere and are sung as a national anthem: “I was, am, and will be a Rusyn” (Я Русин был, есмь, и буду/Ya Rusyn byl, esm’ y budu).

Dukhnovych wrote his popular play *Virtue Is More Important than Riches* in a broad vernacular that would be most comprehensible to the largest number of Rusyn spectators, suggesting a purposeful attempt to work out a standard literary language for the Rusyns of the Hungarian Kingdom. He was succeeded by Aleksander Pavlovych (1819–1900), who wrote poems in the Rusyn vernacular that dealt directly with social conditions and articulated the experiences of a people suffering under cultural and political domination and

<sup>1</sup> Aleksander Dukhnovych, *Virtue Is More Important than Riches: A Play in Three Acts*, trans. Elaine Rusinko (New York: Columbia University Press / East European Monographs, 1994).

economic oppression. In the Lemko Region of Poland as well, there were efforts to introduce vernacular Lemko Rusyn as a literary language. Short stories, historical tales, and memoirs were written by writers such as Vladymir Khÿliak (1843–93) and Petro Polianskii (1863–1910), who emphasized the local geographic and cultural landscape. Lemko-Rusyn literature, however, developed close ties with Old Ruthenian and Russophile centers in eastern Galicia and increasingly used a mixed language based on Russian.

Similarly, in the face of growing Magyar nationalism and the increasing assimilation of the Rusyn intelligentsia, Dukhnovych adopted a Slavophile orientation, an affiliation with Russian culture and the Russian language, as a means of securing the survival of his small Slavic island in the Magyar sea. The work of Dukhnovych and his circle outlined a broad subversive position that would become the basic stance of Rusyn literature for the remainder of the nineteenth century. The challenge to the founders of Rusyn literature at this stage in its development was to assert and maintain a unique national identity, while still claiming an affiliation with the greater Slavic cultural world and attempting to secure a position for Rusyn culture within the Austro-Hungarian political and cultural context. Carpatho-Rusyn literature of the mid-nineteenth century flowed in two parallel streams—one striving toward the expression of universal themes on the sophisticated level of established European culture, the other looking to more local sources of inspiration and voicing indigenous concerns in a popular idiom.

In Subcarpathian Rus', the second half of the nineteenth century was marked by a new round of cultural oppression. Rusyn writers found a sense of belonging and security by stressing their connection to Russia, by expressing Slavophile aspirations, and by using the Russian literary language, albeit imperfectly. In a seemingly counterintuitive move, Rusyn patriots resisted official Hungarian promotion of an independent Rusyn culture and language, renamed "Ruthenian," which they saw as a step toward Magyar assimilation, which was, in fact, proceeding apace. The Greek Catholic bishop of the time, Shtefan Pankovych, not only did not support the Rusyn cultural movement, but he issued an anathema against it, announcing, "If we live under the Magyars, we should become Magyars." Thus, at the end of the nineteenth century, writers such as Aleksander Mytrak (1837–1913), Anatolii Kralyts'kyi (1835–94), Ivan Sil'vai (1838–1904), Yevhenii Fentsyk (1844–1903), and Yulii Stavrovs'kyi-Popradov (1850–99), who are honored as the second generation of Rusyn awakeners, wrote poetry in a Subcarpathian version of Russian and thematically identified Rusyn culture with that of Russia.

Among the Lemkos also, literature became a weapon in the struggle for ethnic self-consciousness. It helped to define the Lemko Region as a distinct cultural and ethnic entity, albeit within the context of an East Slavic/Common Russian cultural and patriotic framework. For both Lemkos and Subcar-

pathian Rusyns, Russophilism was a logical defense against cultural domination by the governing power. But whatever spiritual nourishment Russian culture may have provided, the Rusyn dependence on Russian models greatly impeded the construction of an authentic national literature. At the end of the nineteenth century, Rusyn literature, and in fact, the Rusyn ethnos, seemed to be in grave danger.

The First World War and the subsequent dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire created an atmosphere that was conducive to the revival of Rusyn identity, and the interwar years of the twentieth century saw a renaissance for Rusyn culture. Following the collapse of Austria-Hungary, Subcarpathian Rus' (Czech: Podkarpatská Rus) became part of Czechoslovakia, the Lemko Region came under Polish rule, and the Rusyns living in the Vojvodina region of southern Hungary became part of the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. For the first time, the Rusyn intelligentsia was relatively free to work out their own cultural identity and to express it in their own language and literature. In the Czechoslovakian province of Subcarpathian Rus', where the majority of Rusyns lived, Rusyn functioned as an official language in schools and government administration. Civic organizations, newspapers, publishing houses, theaters, and artistic life flourished.

However, shaped by its history of oppression, the Rusyn community was now fragmented along linguistic, religious, and political lines. The emergence of Ukraine as one of the founding republics of the Soviet Union and the activity of Ukrainophile cultural and political leaders in the tolerant atmosphere of Subcarpathian Rus' advanced the Ukrainian orientation and the Ukrainian language among Rusyns. As a result, two opposing versions of the "Rusyn community" emerged—one continuing to affirm the Russian identity of Rusyns, the other asserting that Rusyns were, in fact, Ukrainians. While both sides looked to local tradition and expressed a sense of Rusyn patriotism, the body of literature they produced during the 1920s and 1930s was diverse in language and content. Vasyl' Grendzha-Dons'kyi (1897–1974) was the first Subcarpathian author to use literary Ukrainian in his lyric poetry and novels of social protest. Yulii Borshosh-Kum'iats'kyi (1905–78) and Sevastiian Sabol (pseud. Zoreslav, 1909–2003) also believed that Rusyns could best survive by adapting to Ukrainian culture. By contrast, Russophile poets such as Andrii Karabelesh (1906–64), Mykhail Popovych (1908–56), and Andrii Patrus-Karpats'kyi (1917–80) stressed the Rusyns' cultural connection to Russia. Using literary Russian, these authors expressed the same themes and emotions as the Ukrainophiles but appealed to the concept of a common-Russian (*obscherusskii*) culture for identification and support.

In the intense Russophile-Ukrainophile polemics of the interwar years, the Rusyn voice was scarcely heard. Finally, amid the international crises that preceded the coming of World War II, Subcarpathia achieved a short-lived

period of autonomy (1938–39) and exactly one day of independence (March 15, 1939) before being annexed by Hungary. Literature was again compelled to adapt to political circumstances. Ironically, it was only during the World War II years that a literature based on the Rusyn vernacular language finally arose, and writers emerged from the crippling Russian-Ukrainian rivalry into a Rusyn version of modernism. Unfortunately, whatever promise this new Rusynophile orientation may have held was rendered futile by its dependence on the odious pro-Nazi Hungarian occupiers and was extinguished entirely at the close of World War II, when Subcarpathian Rus' was annexed to the Soviet Union and Rusyns were declared to be Ukrainians.

In Poland as well, the interwar years were a period of growth for Lemko-Rusyn identity in literature. Writers such as Ivan Ruseiko (1890–1960) wrote patriotic and inspirational verses in the Lemko-Rusyn language, and Dymytrii Vyslotskii (pseud. Van'õ Hunianka, 1888–1968) wrote satiric stories about Lemko life in the vernacular language. Together, they created a distinct Lemko orientation in Rusyn literary evolution and provided a foundation for the subsequent standardization of the Lemko-Rusyn literary language. However, the effort to introduce a Ukrainian national identity also had success in the Lemko region. Writers—some of Lemko origin and others non-Lemkos—wrote propagandistic, didactic works for Lemko audiences. The greatest Lemko lyrical poet, Bohdan Ihor Antonych (1909–37), immortalized his native Lemko Region in Ukrainian-language poetry.

Thus, the interwar years of the twentieth century provided a rebirth for Rusyn literary culture, if not a definite Rusyn direction. This period of progress was ended by World War II, which had devastating consequences for Rusyns. In 1945, Subcarpathian Rus', the former autonomous province of Czechoslovakia, was annexed to what was described as the "Soviet Ukrainian motherland," a decision made with no general plebiscite and no Carpatho-Rusyn representation. Traditional Carpatho-Rusyn identity was uprooted, along with the Rusyn language, religion, and the traditional Rusyn way of life. The Greek Catholic Church was outlawed and the nationality question was resolved by Soviet decree. Based on a decision made by the Communist party of Ukraine in December 1945, all Rusyns, regardless of what they may have called themselves, were forcibly listed in official documents as Ukrainians. The Rusyn language was banned in schools and in all publications.

Similarly, in the Prešov region of Czechoslovakia, Rusyns were subjected to collectivization, the liquidation of their church and, after 1952, forced ukrainianization. The people responded by identifying themselves as Slovaks and sending their children to Slovak schools, leading to massive national assimilation. The Czechoslovak state created a wide range of Ukrainian cultural organizations for Rusyns. Writers were forced to switch from Rusyn or Russian to Ukrainian, and scholars began to study the literary work of the

“Ukrainians of Eastern Slovakia” within a socialist political paradigm. During the Prague spring of 1968, Carpatho-Rusyns in the Prešov Region, whose numbers had declined by two-thirds since forced ukrainianization was instituted, demanded the return of their nationality and the re-establishment of Rusyn schools and publications. Scholarly and broad-based efforts were cut short, however, by the invasion of the country by the Soviet Union, and within a year, Czechoslovak authorities had once again banned all activity that might in any way be connected with a distinct Carpatho-Rusyn identity.

An even worse calamity befell the Lemko Rusyns in Poland. From 1944 to 1947, the Lemko-Rusyn population was subjected to deportation and resettlement from their Carpathian homeland at the hands of Polish Communist authorities. Some 100,000 Lemkos were deported to Soviet Ukraine; and in the 1947 Vistula Operation, 50,000 to 60,000 Lemkos were deported and resettled in the western and northern territories of Poland. Not only did these resettlements deprive the Lemkos of their property, they also severely damaged the Lemko community and culture by scattering the population among different towns and villages, since it was ordered that Lemkos compose no more than ten percent of the population in any single village or town. Since 1957, a few thousand deportees have managed to return to their Carpathian homeland, but there has been no compensation for their losses, and the Lemko community remains scattered and fragmented. These tragic events naturally had a deleterious effect on Lemko culture, and they are central to Lemko cultural consciousness down to the present, providing a poignant theme for writers, artists, and filmmakers.

Of all European Rusyns, those living in Yugoslavia enjoyed the most favorable conditions for national and cultural development in the twentieth century. The beginning of conscious literary creativity among Vojvodinian Rusyns dates from the early nineteenth century; the first separately published volume in the Rusyn language, a book of poems by Havriil/Gabor Kostel'nik (1886–1948) appeared in 1904. Kostel'nik also published the first grammar of the Vojvodinian-Rusyn language in 1923. The Rusyn publishing house Ruske Slovo was established in 1936 to publish Rusyn books and periodicals, and a department of Rusyn language and literature was created at the University of Novi Sad in 1975. There is a Museum of Rusyn Culture and a Rusyn Art Gallery in Ruski Kerestur, where the population is overwhelmingly Rusyn. The Petro Riznich Diadia Rusyn National Theater, which performs all its plays in the Vojvodinian variant of the Rusyn language, opened in 1969, performing in Ruski Kerestur and Novi Sad. Vojvodinian Rusyn literature—with its roots in East Slavic culture and close ties to the South Slavic intellectual world within which it developed, but written in a language that shares East and West Slavic characteristics—represents a unique Slavic *mélange*.

Thus, except for the Rusyns of Yugoslavia, after 1945 Carpatho-Rusyns had officially ceased to exist in Europe. Along with them, Rusyn literature disappeared in the Rusyn homeland. Ukrainian was declared the only acceptable literary language, and all local feeling and loyalties were officially replaced by Communist ideals. Rusyn writers were then subjected to the demands of Socialist Realism, and any traces of a distinctive Rusyn literature disappeared. Only a few writers, mostly amateur authors living in the countryside, were allowed to publish lyrical poetry and stories in Rusyn dialect that dealt with nature, village life, and traditions, although even dialectal texts generally had to be "ukrainianized" in order to be published. In Poland, the Lemko-Rusyn language could be found only in the Lemko section ("Lemkivska storinka") of Poland's Ukrainian-language newspaper *Nashe slovo*. The literature published there was limited to a popular, folk orientation and was propagandistic in nature, promoting the view that Lemkos are a branch of the Ukrainian nationality. The question of Rusyn identity among the Lemkos would officially return only during brief periods of political thaw (1956, 1980–81). In fact, it seemed that Rusyn literature, which had managed to survive centuries of oppression under the Habsburg empire, had fallen victim to Soviet domination almost everywhere in the Eastern European homeland.

Since the fall of Communism in 1989, however, the situation has altered significantly. While Rusyns in Ukraine are still struggling for their name and language, in Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, and Romania, Carpatho-Rusyns are now recognized as a national minority and have established community organizations that promote a Rusyn ideology. The Rusyns of the Vojvodina, on the other hand, were overtaken since the fall of Communism by wars and economic troubles that have presented challenges to their national and cultural development. During the 1991 conflict between Serbs and Croats, Rusyns were caught in the middle, since there were Rusyn settlements in both regions. Several Rusyn communities in eastern Croatia were destroyed, and the battle for Vukovar resulted in numerous Rusyn civilian losses. After the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1992, Serbia and Montenegro formed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which included the Vojvodina. Since 2003, Rusyn-occupied territory has been part of both the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, and the Republic of Croatia, leaving Vojvodinian Rusyns divided by a national border. Today, the Vojvodina, with a population of about two million, is one of the most ethnically diverse territories in Europe. Rusyns represent less than one percent of the population, although unofficial data suggest there may be as many as 35,000 Rusyns.

Everywhere in the European homeland, Rusyn organizations promote the resurrection and reinvigoration of Rusyn culture. In Poland, alongside organizations formed before 1995, the Lemko Rusyns have established a foundation (Rutenika Foundation for the Support of the Lemko Minority), whose goal is

to secure Polish and European Union funding for publications, education, and cultural preservation projects. In Hungary, Rusyns are represented by self-governing communities, which receive state funds for cultural activity. In the sphere of education, Rusyn language and culture are taught at the university level at the Institute of Rusyn Language and Culture at Prešov University in Slovakia, the Advanced School of Education (Akademia Pedagogiczna) in Krakow, and the University of Novi Sad in Serbia. In addition, research and publishing on Rusyn topics is conducted in the Department of Ukrainian and Rusyn Philology at the School of Higher Education in Nyíregyháza, Hungary. Even in Ukraine, where the government gives no support to Rusyn-language education, a private network of “Sunday schools,” initially financed by private individuals and organizations in North America, preserves and propagates Rusyn language and culture. In Serbia, the Rusyn National Theater now has a professional full-time staff, and in Slovakia the professional Aleksander Dukhnovych Theater in Prešov performs plays from the repertoire of world drama in the Rusyn language. In all these countries, Rusyn-language newspapers and magazines are published and distributed widely, and two publishing houses (Narodný novynký in Prešov, Slovakia, and the Valerii Padiak Publishing House in Uzhhorod, Ukraine) specialize in Rusyn-language or Rusyn-related books. To encourage the creation of original creative literature in the Rusyn language, the Aleksander Dukhnovych Prize for Rusyn Literature, funded by Steven Chepa, a Canadian businessman and philanthropist of Rusyn heritage, has been granted annually since 1997 to an author whose work makes a substantial contribution to Rusyn-language literature. Many of the Dukhnovych Prize laureates are represented in this volume.

In poetry and artistic prose, Rusyn writers responded quickly to the fall of Communism. Many who had previously made a career using Ukrainian, Slovak, or Polish now turned to some form of the Rusyn language and applied their talent and expertise to rejuvenating a Rusyn national literature. Not surprisingly, one of the most important thematic concerns is Rusyn identity—its history, survival into the present, and its preservation for the future. Creative writers, of course, have always been important in shaping national identities, and recent studies of nation formation have emphasized the creative element of cultural construction that underlies the process. As literary theorist Homi Bhabha has indicated, the literature of transnational border regions may hold lessons for contemporary culture: “Where, once, the transmission of national traditions was the major theme of world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees—these border and frontier conditions—may be the terrains of world literature.”<sup>2</sup> Carpathian Rus' is just such a transnational frontier in the Slavic

---

<sup>2</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 12.

world. A representative sampling demonstrates the variety, scope, and hybridity of the literature of the Rusyn national revival, representing an effort to create a national literature by blending cultural traditions and ethnicity in defiance of state and linguistic boundaries.